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THE STORY OF THE BOLD PÉCOPIN



VICTOR HUGO



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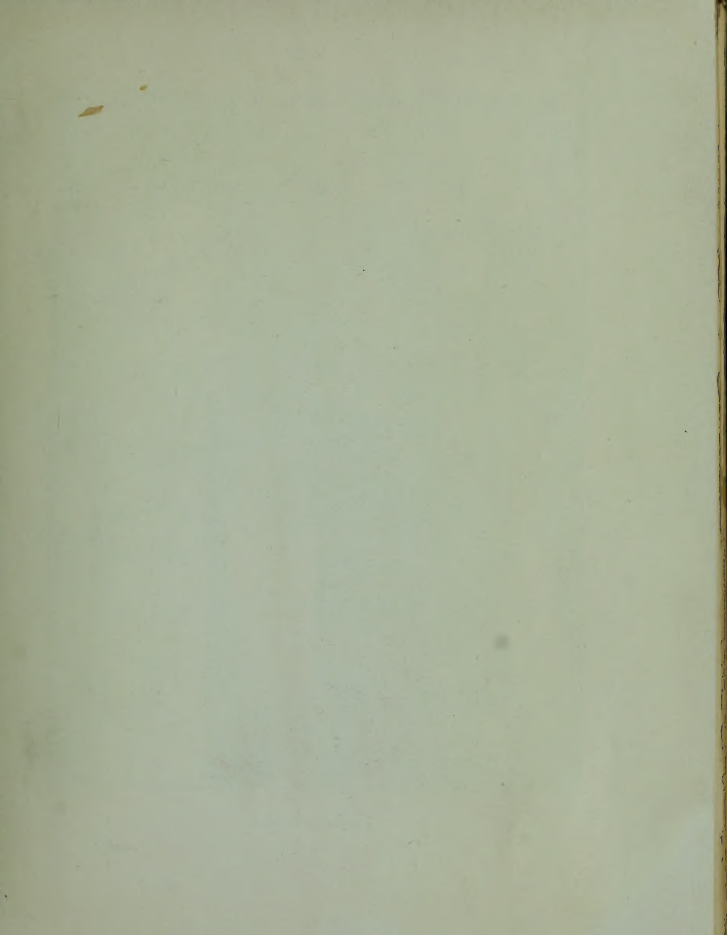
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THE STORY OF THE
BOLD PÉCOPIN

A LEGEND OF THE RHINE





Pécopin and Bauldour

Frontispiece
(see p. 4)

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THE STORY OF THE BOLD PÉCOPIN

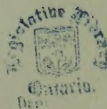
A LEGEND OF THE RHINE

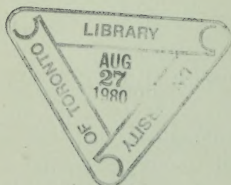
BY
VICTOR HUGO

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY
ELEANOR AND AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
H. R. MILLAR

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brief

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The original of this story is to be found in Victor Hugo's Le Rhin (1842). The only liberty the Translators have taken with it over and above the initial and perhaps unpardonable liberty of touching the legend at all, is that they have slightly compressed it. The verse-translation is the work of Charles Tennyson, Scholar of King's College, Cambridge.

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THE STORY OF THE BOLD PÉCOPIN

CHAPTER I



HE bold Pécopin loved the beautiful Bauldour, and the beautiful Bauldour loved the bold Pécopin. He was son to the Burgrave of Sonneck, she daughter of the Lord of Falkenburg. One owned the forest, the other the mountain. What more obvious than for the mountain and the forest to make a match? The two fathers were agreed, and Pécopin was betrothed to Bauldour. The betrothal was on an April day. The hawthorn and elder in the forest were flowering in the sunshine, a thousand charming little waterfalls—snow and rain transformed into murmuring rills, winter rudenesses into spring graces—danced melodiously among the mountains, and love, that

April of man's existence, sang, sparkled, and expanded in the hearts of the lovers. Pécopin's father, an aged and valiant knight, the pride of Nahegau, died soon after the betrothal, blessing his son and commending Bauldour to him. Pécopin wept, then gradually he raised his eyes to the gentle and radiant face of his love and was comforted. When the moon rises, who dwells on the vanished sun? Pécopin had all the qualities of a man—a young man and a man of honour. Bauldour was a queen in her domain, a saint at her devotions, a nymph in the wood, a fairy at her needle. Pécopin was a mighty hunter, Bauldour an accomplished spinner. Now, between the distaff and the game-bag there is no antagonism. The spinner spins while the hunter hunts; he is absent, the distaff diverts and consoles. The dogs bark, the spinning-wheel hums. The distant sounds of hound and horn, deep in the thicket, seem to say with a vague suggestion of a flourish, "Think of your lover." The spinning-wheel, which compels the lovely dreamer to lower her eyes, says unceasingly in a gentle yet incisive little voice,

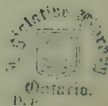
“Think of your husband.” And when husband and lover are one, all goes well. Therefore wed the spinner to the hunter and fear nought. However, to say truth, Pécopin loved hunting too well. When he was on horseback, falcon on wrist, when he followed the game with his eye, when he heard the fierce baying of the crooked-legged sleuth-hounds, he was off, he flew, everything was forgotten. But it is best to be excessive in nothing. Happiness is moderation; control your tastes and bridle your appetites. Who loves horses and dogs too much offends women, who loves women too much offends the Deity. When Bauldour (and this often happened)—when Bauldour saw Pécopin mounted and ready, his horse neighing with delight, prouder than if he carried Alexander the Great in all his glory—when, I say, she saw Pécopin stroking and caressing his favourite, Bauldour was jealous of the horse. When Bauldour, this proud and noble maiden, this star of love, youth, and beauty, saw Pécopin petting his mastiff, laying his charming and manly head close to that snub nose, those great nostrils,

wide ears, and dusky jaws, Bauldour was jealous of the dog. She withdrew to her own apartments, vexed and sad. Then she scolded her maids, and after her maids she scolded her dwarf, for the anger of women is like rain in the forest, it falls twice over. *Bis pluît.* At nightfall Pécopin returned, dusty and weary. Bauldour sulked and grumbled a little, with a tear in the corner of her blue eyes. But Pécopin kissed her little hand and she was silent. Pécopin kissed her lovely brow and she smiled. Bauldour's brow was white, pure, and exquisite as the ivory horn of Charlemagne. Then she retired to her turret, and he to his. She never allowed him to put his arms around her: modesty is to woman what chivalry is to man.

CHAPTER II



HERE was in the Sonneck hunt a clever rogue of a huntsman, free of speech and of a malicious temper, called Erlangus. This man, formerly a very skilful archer, had been wooed by many peasant girls of Lorch, but had repelled all advances and turned huntsman. Pécopin asked him the reason. Erlangus answered, "My lord, dogs have seven kinds of madness — women a thousand." Another day, hearing of the approaching marriage of his master, Erlangus came boldly to him and said, "My lord, why do you marry?" Pécopin sent him about his business. This might have made the knight uneasy, for Erlangus had a long memory, and was cunning and full of deceit. But the truth is, the fellow went to the court of the Marquis de Lusace, where he became first huntsman, and Pécopin heard no more of him. A week before the mar-



riage day Bauldour was spinning in the window-seat, when her dwarf announced that Pécopin was mounting the stairs. She rose from her straight-backed carved chair to run and meet him, and catching her foot in the thread of her distaff, she fell. Poor Bauldour got up unhurt, but she remembered that just such an accident had befallen the Lady Liba, and her heart sank. Pécopin entered radiant, spoke of their wedding and their happiness, and the cloud lifted from her heart.

CHAPTER III



HE next day Bauldour was spinning in her chamber and Pécopin was hunting in the forest. He was alone, and had only one dog with him.

Following where the chase led, he came to a farm at the entrance to the forest of Sonn, which marked the boundary of the two estates of Sonneck and Falkenburg. This farm was shaded on the east by four great trees, an ash, an elm, a fir, and an oak, which were called in the countryside "The Four Evangelists." They were magic trees. Just as Pécopin passed beneath their shadow, four birds were perched on these four trees, a jay on the ash, a blackbird on the elm, a magpie on the fir, and a raven on the oak. The four different notes of these four feathered creatures mingled strangely, and they seemed almost to question and answer one another. The cooing of a pigeon and the clucking of a hen

could be heard, though neither pigeon nor hen could be seen, because the one was in the wood and the other in the poultry-yard. A few steps farther on, an old man, all bent, was piling logs against a wall for winter use. Seeing Pécopin approach, he turned and drew himself up.

"Sir Knight," exclaimed he, "do you hear what the birds are saying?"

"Good man," replied Pécopin, "what does it matter?"

"Sir," resumed the peasant, "to the ear of the young man the jay chatters, the magpie screeches, the blackbird whistles, the raven croaks—for the old man the birds talk."

The knight burst out laughing.

"By heaven, what a fancy!"

The old man continued gravely—

"You are wrong, Sir Pécopin."

"You have never seen me, how do you know my name?"

"The birds have told it to me," said the peasant.

"You are an old madman, my good fellow," said Pécopin; and he went on his way.

About an hour afterwards, as he was crossing a



H. R. MILNER 1902

"You are an old madman, my good fellow," said Pécopin

glade, he heard the sound of a horn, and saw in the forest a gallant company of knights. It was the Count Palatine going a-hunting accompanied by the Burgraves who are Counts of the Castle, the Waldgraves who are Counts of the Forest, the Landgraves who are Counts of the Plain, the Rhingraves who are Counts of the Rhine, and the Raugraves who are Counts of the *Droit du Pong*. A gentleman belonging to the Pfalzgraf named Gaïrefroi caught sight of Pécopin and hailed him, "Hullo, my fine huntsman, are you not coming with us?"

"Where are you going?" asked Pécopin.

"Fair huntsman," answered Gaïrefroi, "we go to shoot a kite at Heimbург which destroys our pheasants, we go to shoot a vulture at Vaugtsburg which exterminates our muir-fowl, we go to shoot an eagle at Rheinstein which kills our falcons. Come with us."

"When will you be back?" asked Pécopin.

"To-morrow," answered Gaïrefroi.

"I am with you," said Pécopin.

The sport lasted three days.

The first day Pécopin killed the kite, the

second day Pécopin killed the vulture, the third day Pécopin killed the eagle.

The Count Palatine marvelled at so excellent a shot.

"Knight of Sonneck," said he, "I give you the fief Rhineck, adjoining my tower of Gutenfels. You will follow me to Stahleck to receive the investiture and take the oath of allegiance, in public and in the presence of the sheriffs, as provided for by the charters of the sainted Emperor Charlemagne."

To obey was unavoidable. Pécopin sent Bauldour a message in which he sadly told her that the gracious command of the Pfalzgraf obliged him to go immediately to Stahleck on a matter of great urgency.

"Be at peace, madame ma mie," he ended, "I shall be back next month."

The messenger having departed, Pécopin followed the Palatine and retired to rest with the knights of the prince's train in the lower castle ward at Bacharach. That night he had a dream. He saw again the outskirts of the forest of Sonneck, the farm, the four trees, and

the four birds. The birds were not screaming, or whistling, or singing: they spoke. Their chattering, in which mingled the voices of the pigeon and the hen, seemed to shape itself into a strange kind of dialogue, which the sleeping Pécopin could hear quite distinctly:—

THE JAY.

The pigeon away to the woods is flown.

THE BLACKBIRD.

*The hen in the courtyard all alone,
Pécopin! Pécopin! sadly cries.*

THE JAY.

Bauldour! Bauldour! the pigeon sighs.

THE RAVEN.

The knight fares out in the world so wide.

THE MAGPIE.

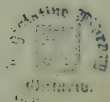
The lady is in her tower.

THE JAY.

From Aleppo or Fez will he homeward ride?

THE BLACKBIRD.

He rides from Damanhour.



Pécopin awoke in a cold sweat. At once he remembered the old man, and was terrified, without knowing why, by this dream and this dialogue. He tried to interpret his dream, and failing, fell asleep. The next morning when dawn broke, when he saw again the glorious sun, the banisher of phantoms, the disperser of dreams, he thought no more of the four trees or the four birds.

CHAPTER IV



ÉCOPIN was a distinguished, highly born, witty, and handsome gentleman. Once introduced into the Court of the Pfalzgraf and installed in his new fief, he pleased the Palatine so much that the worthy prince said to him one day, "Friend, I am sending an embassy to my cousin of Burgundy, and I have chosen you for ambassador because of your agreeable reputation."

Pécopin had to do the bidding of his prince.

Arrived at Dijon, his eloquence distinguished him so much that one night, after having emptied three large glasses of Bacharach wine, the duke said to him—

"Sir Pécopin, you are our friend. I have some dispute with my lord, the King of France, and the Count Palatine gives me leave to send you to the king, for I have chosen you as ambassador on account of your high lineage."

He went to Paris. The king delighted in him, and taking him aside one morning—

“By the Lord, Sir Pécopin,” said he, “since the Palatine has lent you to the Burgundian for the service of Burgundy, the Burgundian will surely lend you to the King of France for the service of Christendom. I need a very noble lord to make certain remonstrances on my behalf to the Miramolin of the Moors in Spain, and I have chosen you for ambassador because of your excellent wit.”

One may refuse the Emperor one’s vote, or the Pope one’s wife, but to the King of France one may refuse nothing.

Pécopin set out for Spain. At Granada the Miramolin received him admirably well, and invited him to the Zambras of the Alhambra. Every day passed in feasting, in jousts, in racing and hunting, in all of which Pécopin took part as became a mighty champion and hunter. Notwithstanding the excellent sport provided by the Miramolin, he did not neglect the business of the King of France. As soon as the negotiations were at an end, the knight

presented himself before the Sultan to take leave.

"I accept your farewell, Sir Christian," said the Miramolin, "for in truth you are about to depart immediately for Bagdad."

"For Bagdad?" cried Pécopin.

"Yes, Sir Knight," replied the Moorish prince, "for I cannot sign the treaty with the King of Paris without the consent of the Caliph of Bagdad, who is the Commander of the Faithful. I must choose some one of great consideration to send to the Caliph, and I have chosen you because of your noble appearance."

When one is with the Moors, one does what one is told. They are dogs and infidels.

Pécopin went to Bagdad. There he had an adventure. One day when he was passing beneath the walls of the Harem, the favourite Sultana caught sight of him, and as he was handsome, sad, and haughty, she fell hopelessly in love. She sent a black female slave, who accosted the knight in the public garden of the town by the great lime tree which still flourishes there, and gave him a talisman, saying—

"This comes from a princess who loves you, and whom you will never see. Keep this talisman; so long as you wear it you will remain young. When your life is in danger, touch it and you will be safe."

Pécopin accepted the talisman, which was a fine turquoise, engraved with strange characters, and fastened it to the chain he wore about his neck.

"Now, my lord," added the slave, "note this well: whilst you wear that turquoise you will not age by one day. If you lose it you will, in one moment, age by all the accumulated years you have left behind you. Adieu, fair Giaour."

With this the negress left him. But the Caliph had seen the Sultana's slave speaking to the Christian knight.

He was a very jealous Caliph, and something of a magician. He invited Pécopin to a feast, and at nightfall took him to the top of a high tower. Pécopin incautiously went to the edge of the low parapet, and the Caliph addressed him thus: "Sir Knight, the Count Palatine sent you to the Duke of Burgundy because of your agreeable

reputation, the Duke of Burgundy sent you to the King of France because of your high lineage, the King of France sent you to the Miramolin of Granada because of your excellent wit, the Miramolin of Granada sent you to the Caliph of Bagdad because of your noble appearance, I, because of your agreeable reputation, your high lineage, your excellent wit, your noble appearance, I send you to the devil."

As he pronounced this last word the Caliph gave Pécopin a violent push, he lost his balance, and fell headlong from the top of the tower.

CHAPTER V



WHEN a man finds himself suddenly in the very jaws of death, a lightning flash seems to show him at once the life he is about to quit, and the death he is about to enter.

At this supreme moment Pécopin's last thought was for Bauldour. His hand went to his heart and unconsciously pressed the talisman. As his fingers touched it he felt himself supported as on wings. He no longer fell, but soared aloft. All night he flew, but at daybreak the invisible hand which supported him laid him gently down upon a solitary sea-shore.



As he pronounced this last word the Caliph gave Pécopin a violent push

CHAPTER VI



OW, just at this time a singular and unpleasant adventure befell the devil. The devil is used to carry off in a basket the souls that belong to him, as may be seen on the doorway of the Cathedral of Fribourg in Switzerland, where he is represented with a pig's head, a crook in his hand, and a rag-picker's basket on his back, for the evil one rakes out the wicked souls from the refuse heaps which the human race accumulates at the corner of all great earthly and divine truths. The devil got into the way of leaving his basket open, so that many souls managed to escape. Observing this, the evil one put a stout cover on his basket and a good padlock. Still, the souls, who are full of cunning, made but little of the cover, and aided by the small rosy fingers of the Cherubs, found a way of escape through the open-work of the basket. Much put out, the devil slew a

dromedary, and with the skin of the hump contrived a leather sack, into which he crammed as many souls as he possibly could, and with the help of the demon Hermes made it so secure that escape was out of the question. The devil now felt himself happier than a schoolboy with a pocketful of half-crowns. It is usually in Upper Egypt, by the shores of the Red Sea, after going his rounds among pagans and unbelievers, that the devil fills his leather bag. The place is very solitary, a stretch of sand, near a small forest of palms, between Coma, where St. Anthony was born, and Clisma, where St. Sisoës died.

One day, after the devil had had even better sport than usual, he was gaily filling his bag when, happening to turn round, he saw an angel watching him, with a smile on his face. The devil shrugged his shoulders, and went on shovelling in the souls, sorting them precious little, I dare swear, for anything is good enough for the devil's cauldron.

When he had finished he seized the bag with one hand to hoist it on to his shoulder, but he could not lift it from the ground—so full had he filled it, and so heavy it was by reason of their

sins. Again he tried, this time with both hands, but the second effort was no more effective than the first: the thing would not budge an inch. "Oh, souls of lead!" said the devil; and he began to curse and to swear. Looking round, he saw the angel was laughing.

"What are you doing there?" cried the fiend.

"You can see for yourself," said the angel; "a moment ago I smiled, now I am laughing."

"Oh, celestial fowl, great simpleton, get away with you," answered Asmodeus.

But the angel grew stern, and spoke as follows—

"Dragon, hear the words I am charged to utter by the Lord of all: you will not get that load of souls to Gehenna till a saint from paradise, or a Christian fallen from the skies, has helped you to lift it from the ground and place it on your shoulder."

So saying, the angel spread his wings and flew away.

The devil was greatly irritated.

"What does that fool mean?" he muttered between his teeth; "'a saint from paradise, or a



Christian fallen from the skies' ? I may stop here long enough if I am to wait for such assistance as that. Why the deuce did I cram the bag so full ? and that ninny, who is neither flesh nor fowl, was making fun of me. Now I must wait for the saint from paradise, or the Christian who is to fall from the skies—what a silly business : they seem easily amused up there."

While he uttered these words the inhabitants of Coma and Clisma thought they heard distant thunder. It was the devil grumbling.

To a carter who has stuck in the mud it is some relief to swear, but to get out of the rut is still better. The poor devil was hammering his brains.

It so happens that four saints, famous for their close friendship—St. Nil the Solitary, St. Autremoine, St. John the Dwarf, and St. Medard—had chosen this very day for a stroll on the shores of the Red Sea. Talking as they went, they approached the palm wood without noticing the devil, who at once assumed the shape of a poverty-stricken and infirm old man, and began to utter loud lamentations. The saints drew nearer.

"What is the matter?" said St. Nil.

"Alas! alas! my noble lords," cried the devil, "help me, I beseech you. I have a very wicked master; I am a poor slave; my wicked master is a merchant of Fez. Now you know that all the inhabitants of Fez, the Moors, Numidians, Garamantes, and all the people of Barbary, Nubia, and Egypt, are wicked, perverse, rash, and pitiless, under the influence of the planet Mars. What is more, my master is grievously tormented by the spleen, causing a cold and bitter melancholy, which makes a coward of him though he is fertile in evil inventions. This reacts upon us, poor slaves—upon me, unhappy old man that I am."

"What is your drift, my friend?" said St. Autremoine.

"This, my good lord," replied the fiend: "my master is a great traveller. He is full of hobbies. In every country he goes to he has a fancy to build up a mountain of sand in his garden, brought from the shores of the seas near which this wicked man establishes himself. In Zealand he has erected a mound of black and muddy sand, in Friesland——"

"Devil take you," interrupted St. Nil, who was a bit impetuous, "come to the point; you have wasted a quarter of an hour telling us all these cock-and-bull stories: I count the minutes."

The devil bowed humbly. "You count the minutes, my lord; that shows a noble taste. You must be from the South, for Southerners are more ingenious and given to mathematics, because they are nearer than other men to the zone of the falling stars."

Then suddenly bursting into tears and beating his breast: "Alas! alas! my noble princes, I have a very cruel master. To build his sand mountains he forces me to come every day, an aged man like me, to fill this sack on the sea-shore. I have to carry it on my shoulder. When I have made one journey I must begin all over again, and this lasts from dawn till sunset. If I want to rest, if I want to sleep, if I succumb to fatigue, if the sack is not full, I am beaten. Alas! I am very wretched and full of infirmities. Yesterday I made six journeys; when evening came I was so weary that I could not hoist the sack I had just filled on to my shoulder,

and I spent all night here weeping and terrified of the anger of my master. My lords, my good lords, have pity! Help me to raise this sack to my shoulder that I may return to my master, for if I delay much longer he will kill me."

St. Nil, St. Autremoine, and St. John the Dwarf were moved, and St. Medard began to weep, which caused a rainfall of forty days upon the earth.

But St. Nil said to the fiend—

"I cannot help thee, my friend, and I am sorry for it, but I should have to touch the sack, which is a dead thing, and Holy Writ forbids us to touch dead things under penalty of being defiled."

St. Autremoine said to the fiend—

"I cannot help thee, my friend, and I am sorry for it, but I consider it would be a good work, and good works are a source of vanity to those who do them. I abstain from doing any, in order to preserve my humility."

St. John the Dwarf said to the fiend—

"I cannot help thee, my friend, and I am sorry for it, but, as you see, I am so small I

could not reach to your girdle. How then should I raise the burden to thy shoulder?"

St. Medard, bathed in tears, said to the fiend—

"I cannot help thee, my friend, and I am sorry for it, but I am really so overcome with emotion that my arms have lost all power."

And they went on their way.

The devil was beside himself with rage.

"There are beasts for you!" cried he, watching the saints walk away. "What old pedants! How absurd they look with their long beards. Upon my word, they are even greater fools than the angels."

When an ordinary mortal is in a rage with anybody, he has the satisfaction, such as it is, of wishing him at the devil, but the devil himself is denied this solace. As he was fuming, with his eyes (full of fire and fury) fixed upon the sky, he saw a black speck in the clouds. The speck grew larger, the speck came nearer; the devil saw it was a man, a knight armed cap-à-pie, a Christian with the Red Cross upon his breast, who was falling from the sky. "Never-mind-who be praised!" cried the devil, jumping with joy, "I am saved! Here comes my Christian. I couldn't get the

better of the four saints, but it will be the deuce if I can't get the better of a sinner."

As the devil spoke, Pécopin was gently laid upon the shore and sprang to his feet; then catching sight of this aged man, resting slave-like beside his burden, he walked towards him and asked, "Who are you, friend, and where am I?"

The devil whined out piteously—

"You are on the shores of the Red Sea, my lord, and I am the most unhappy of the unhappy," and he went through the long rigmarole he had before recited to the saints, ending by beseeching the knight to help him hoist the sack on to his back. Pécopin shook his head.

"My good man, that is a most improbable tale."

"Fair sir, who drop from the clouds," answered the devil, "yours is still more improbable, and yet it is true."

"That is undoubtedly the case," said Pécopin.

"And then," pursued the fiend, "what am I to do? If my misfortunes do not sound well, is that my fault? I am as poor in wit as I am in estate, and do not know how to draw the long-bow. My

lamentations must needs tally with my adventures, and I cannot put anything but the truth into my story ; as the stock is, so must the soup be."

"That I admit," said Pécopin.

"And if you come to that," continued the fiend, "what harm can it do a young athlete like yourself to help a poor, infirm, old fellow like me to fasten this sack between his shoulders?"

This argument seemed to Pécopin conclusive. He stooped, lifted the sack from the ground, and prepared to place it on the back of the aged man, who stood bent before him ready to receive it.

The devil is ruined by his vices. He is greedy. At this critical moment the idea occurred to him to add Pécopin's soul to the collection he was about to carry off; but it was first necessary to take Pécopin's life. To accomplish this he set himself in a low voice, and in words of obscure import, to summon an invisible and familiar spirit.

Everybody knows that when the devil converses with other fiends he uses a jargon, half Italian and half Spanish, with here and there a few words of Latin. This has been proved and clearly established in several cases; and more

especially in the trial of Doctor Eugenio Farraloea, which began at Valladolid on 10th January 1526, and was brought to a very proper conclusion on the 6th May 1531 by the auto-da-fé of the said doctor. Therefore, when at the very moment he was fastening the sack on the bowed shoulders of the little old man Pécopin heard him murmur these words, "Bamos, non sierra, occhi, verbera, frappa, y echa la piedra," it was a revelation. A sudden suspicion made him look up, and at a great height above him he saw an enormous stone held suspended over his head by some invisible giant. With the rapidity of the whirlwind, which in the space of a moment sweeps past, flies, turns, lightens, thunders, and strikes, Pécopin threw himself back, and touching his talisman with his left hand, with his right seized his dagger and ripped open the sack from end to end. The devil gave a loud cry. The released souls fled by the way of escape which Pécopin's dagger had made for them, leaving behind in the sack their foul sins and heinous crimes, a hideous heap, which, by the force of attraction natural to the fiend, incrustated itself between his shoulders like a monstrous wen,

and remained for ever fixed. It is from that day that Asmodeus is humpbacked.

At the moment when Pécopin threw himself back, the invisible giant let go his stone, which fell on the devil's foot and crushed it. It is from that day that Asmodeus is lame.

The demon, like the gods, commands the thunder, but it is of an inferior quality. Pécopin felt the sea-shore tremble beneath him, a black smoke blinded him, he was deafened by a terrific noise; he fell, and was conscious of being whirled along like a dead leaf by the wind. Then he fainted.



The devil gave a loud cry

CHAPTER VII



OR many a long day Pécopin wandered over the face of the earth. To describe his journeys would be to write a gazetteer. He travelled barefoot and in sandals, rode on the back of every beast that can be ridden—asses and wild asses, horses, mules, camels, zebras, and elephants. He sailed in every kind of ship, on every kind of voyage. The merchantmen of the high seas, the narrow craft of the Mediterranean, *oneraria et remigia*, galley and galleon, frigate and frigatoon, felucca, polacca, barque, barquette, and barge. He risked his life in the birch canoes of the Indians, and in the leathern coracles of the Euphrates, about which Herodotus has something to say; he was buffeted by every wind of heaven, the scirocco of the Levant and the scirocco of the Mezzogiorno, the tramontane and the mistral; he wandered over Persia, Peru, Bramaz, Tagatai, Transiane, Sagi-



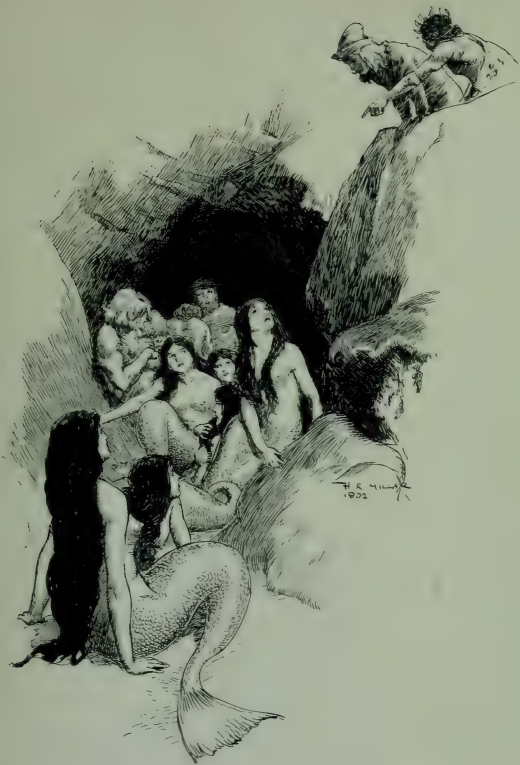
stan, l'Hasubi. He saw the Manomatapa as did Vincent le Blanc, Sofala like Pedro Ordoñez, Ormuz like the Lord of Tines, savages as did Acosta, and giants as did Malherbe de Vitré. He lost in the desert four toes from his foot, like Jerome Costilla. Seventeen times was he sold into slavery, like Mendez-Pinto. He had every fever under the sun; the scurvy which was the terror of Avicenne, and sea-sickness, which Cicero thought worse than death. He climbed mountains of so tremendous a height that on the top he vomited blood. He landed on that island which has never yet been discovered by any one that looked for it, and he verified the fact that its inhabitants are good Christians.

In Midelpalic, which is in the far, far North, he observed a castle where no castle was; but so marvellous are the fascinations of the North that this caused him no surprise. He lived for months with the King of Mogor Ekebas, and was made much of by that potentate, about whose court he could have told you more than has ever since been written by Englishman, Dutchman, or even by the Jesuit Fathers. He

became learned; for was he not taught by the two master-teachers of all knowledge, travel, and misfortune? He studied the fauna and flora of every climate. He recorded the winds by the migrations of birds, and the currents by the movements of the cephalopodes. He saw pass him, in submarine regions, the *Ommastrephes sagittatus* going to the North Pole, and the *Ommastrephes giganteus* going to the South Pole. He saw men and monsters even as did the ancient Greek Ulysses. He saw all the strange creatures of the earth—the rosmar, the black rail, the solan goose, the rushtails of the island of Comore, the capercailzies of Scotland, the antenales that fly in flocks, the alcatrazes big as geese, the moraxos bigger than the tiburons, the peymores of the Maldivé Islands, who eat men, the fish manare which has the head of an ox, the bird claki, who is begotten of rotten wood, the little saru which has a sweeter note than the parrot, and lastly the boranet, the animal-plant of Tartary, which is rooted in the earth and browses on the grass around it. He killed a sea triton of the species yapiaria, and a river triton

of the species *baëpapina* fell in love with him. One day, in the island of Manar, two hundred leagues from Goa, some fishermen showed him seven mermen and nine sirens, whom they had caught in their nets. He heard the nocturnal hammering of the blacksmith of the sea, and he ate of the one hundred and fifty-three different sorts of fish which the Apostles caught when they cast their nets at the bidding of our Lord. In Scythia he captured a gryphon, on which the Arimaspians made war for the sake of the gold which he guards. These folk wished to make Pécopin their king, but he managed to escape them. Afterwards he was as nearly as possible shipwrecked off Cape Gardefù, which the ancients called *Promontorium aromatorum*; and all the while, in the midst of all these adventures, wanderings, toils, deeds of daring, luckless chances, this brave and faithful knight had but one object in view—to get back to Germany; but one hope—to be once more at Falkenburg; but one thought—to see Bauldour again.

Thanks to the talisman of the Sultana, which never left him, he could neither age nor die.



In the Island of Manar . . . some fishermen showed him seven mermen and nine sirens whom they had caught in their nets

Nevertheless he sorrowfully marked the flight of time. When at length he reached the north of France, five years had passed since he saw Bauldour. Sometimes he brooded over this when night came, and he had been tramping since dawn. Then he would sit down on a stone by the roadside and weep. But ere long he forced himself to take courage once more.

"Five years," he said to himself; "yes, but I shall soon see her now. She was fifteen when we parted, now she is twenty; what of that?"

His garments were in rags, his shoes in holes, his feet bleeding; but joy and strength revived, and he set forth on his way again. After this fashion he reached the Vosges Mountains.



CHAPTER VIII



ÉCOPIN had wandered all day among the rocks vainly seeking a way down to the Rhine, and towards night-fall he reached the edge of a wood of fir, ash, and maple. Moodily he plunged into it, and after walking more than an hour, the path he was following suddenly led him into a glade of holly, juniper, and wild raspberry. Close by was a miasma-breathing marsh. Worn out by fatigue, exhausted with hunger and thirst, he looked eagerly about him in hopes of seeing a cottage, a charcoal-burner's hut, or even a herdsman's fire, when all at once a flock of sheldrake flew by screaming and clapping their wings. Pécopin started at the sight of these strange birds, which make their nests underground and are called *canards-lapins* by the simple peasants of the Vosges. He held aside the holly bushes and saw that the turf was everywhere thickly sprinkled

with the blossoms of the samphire, angelica, hellebore, and the greater gentian. He stooped and picked up a shell: it was one of those Valogne mussels which hold pearls as big as peas. Looking up, he saw a great horned owl hovering above his head. Pécopin felt uneasy; the cabalistic herbs, the mussel, the sheldrake, the horned owl—all were disquieting, and he began in alarm to wonder where he could possibly have wandered to, when he heard a distant song. A voice, hoarse and cracked, muffled and yet shrill, sang the following ditty:—

Deep in my little lake that lies
 Beneath the shadows cool,
 Fair Tethys of the laughing eyes
 And swarthy Ocean rule—
 Deep in the pool on the mountains lone,
 By mortal steps untried,
 The great King Ocean has his throne,
 With Tethys at his side.
 I am the Dwarf, hark while I sing,
 Sire of the Giants tall—
 Tell of the two great seas that spring
 Out of my pool so small.

See from the mountain's rocky crown,
 Where never bird has soared,
 There steals for her a blue stream down—
 A green stream for her lord.

See from my grotto in the snows,
Where never fire was seen,
Ever a green stream for him flows—
A blue stream for his queen.
I am the Dwarf, hark while I sing,
Sire of the Giants tall—
Tell of the two great seas that spring
Out of my pool so small.

I have an emerald buried there,
In the yellow sand it lies,
In my humble casket a sapphire rare,
Safe hid from mortal eyes :
My emerald melts, and thence each day
The great Rhine has its birth,
And from my sapphire leaps alway
The lovely Rhone to earth.
I am the Dwarf, hark while I sing,
Sire of the Giants tall—
Tell of the two great seas that spring
Out of my pool so small.

There was no longer any possible doubt ; poor exhausted traveller that he was, Pécopin had strayed into the fatal "Forest of Lost Steps." In this great forest full of labyrinths and mazes the dwarf Roulon wanders to and fro. Roulon dwells in a lake in the Vosges on one of the highest of the mountain summits, and, because from this lake one small streamlet finds its way

to the Rhine and another to the Rhone, this braggart dwarf calls himself the Father of the German Ocean and of the Mediterranean. His delight is to roam about the forest, and to make travellers lose their way. He who enters the forest of Lost Steps never finds his way out. The voice and the song were those of Roulon. Pécopin threw himself on the ground in despair and hid his face. "Alas!" he cried, "it is all over. I shall never see Bauldour more."

"Indeed you will," said a voice at his elbow.

Pécopin started up. An old gentleman, clad in a magnificent hunting suit, was standing close by him. His equipment was complete in every detail. A hunting-knife, with a handle of chased gold, hung at his side, and from his belt was slung a buffalo horn, curiously inlaid. There was something weird and vaguely luminous in his pale, smiling countenance, as revealed by the glimmer of the fading twilight. The sudden apparition of an old huntsman in such a place, and at such an hour, was certainly strange, but in the forest of Lost Steps no one thinks of anything except Roulon. The old man was not a dwarf—that

was enough for Pécopin. Moreover, he had a gracious, easy, and attractive appearance, and though in full hunting trim, he was so old, so worn, so bent, had such wrinkled and feeble hands, such white eyebrows and shrunken limbs, that it would have been shameful to be afraid of him.

"What do you want with me?" asked Pécopin.

"To restore you to Bauldour," answered the old man, smiling still.

"When?"

"Spend only one night in hunting with me."

"What night?"

"The one now beginning."

"And I shall see Bauldour again?"

"When the hunt is finished, at sunrise, I will leave you at the door of Falkenburg."

"Hunt by night?"

"Why not?"

"It is unusual."

"Bah!"

"It is very fatiguing."

"Not at all."

"But you are very old."

"Do not worry yourself about me."

"But I am tired, I have tramped all day; I am half dead with hunger and thirst," said Pécopin. "I could not even sit a horse."

The hunter loosed from his belt a silver-embossed gourd and gave it to Pécopin.

"Drink this."

Pécopin put his lips to the gourd, and had swallowed but a mouthful when he felt himself restored—he was young, strong, alert, full of power—he had slept, he had eaten, he had drunk, indeed now and again it almost seemed as if he had drunk too much.

"Come," he cried, "let us walk, run, hunt all night; I am ready and willing. But I shall see Bauldour again?"

"At sunrise."

"And what guarantee do you give me?"

"My presence here, the succour I bring you. I might have left you to die here of hunger, fatigue, and misery; I might have abandoned you to the Dwarf of the Lake, but I had compassion on you."

"I will follow you," said Pécopin, "it is a bargain—Falkenburg at sunrise."

"Hola, you over there," called the old lord, raising his feeble voice to the uttermost, and turning his back towards Pécopin. Pécopin saw he was humpbacked; he walked a few paces, and Pécopin saw he was lame. A band of cavaliers, dressed like princes and mounted like kings, emerged from the depths of the wood at the call of the old huntsman. He appeared to be their master, and they ranged themselves round him in profound silence. All carried knives or boar spears; he alone had a horn. It was now night, but two hundred linkmen, each carrying a torch, accompanied the cavaliers.

"Ebbene," said the master, "ubi sunt los perros?"

This mixture of Italian, Latin, and Spanish impressed Pécopin disagreeably, but the old man continued to call impatiently—

"The dogs, the dogs."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a terrific barking re-echoed through the glade, and at the same moment a pack of hounds came in sight—an incomparable pack—a pack fit for an emperor. Whippers-in with yellow coats and scarlet stock-

ings, ferocious-looking kennel men and naked negroes, held them firmly in leash. Never was council of dogs more complete. There were there all imaginable dogs, coupled and divided into groups according to instinct and breed. The first group consisted of a hundred English bulldogs, and a hundred greyhounds in leash.

The second group was entirely composed of Barbary dogs, used for herding cattle, and not to be frightened by any sound that can be heard.

The third group was a legion of Norwegian hounds, tawny, inclining to red, with a white patch on the forehead or neck, keen of scent and of high courage, and specially delighting in the stag-hunt.

There was not a single mongrel amongst all these.

The fourth group was striking. It was a tumultuous, dense crowd of the powerful black mastiffs of the Abbey of St. Aubert-in-Ardenne, which, though short-legged and somewhat slow, breed formidable sleuth-hounds, and hunt the wild boar with ferocity.

The fifth group was Eastern, and must have cost enormous sums, for it was composed only of

dogs of Palimbotra, the natural foes of the wild bull, dogs of Cinliqui, who pull down the lion, and dogs of Monomotapa, who form part of the guard of the Great Mogul. All of them, from whatever part of the world they came, whether from England, Barbary, Norway, the Ardennes or Hindostan, howled outrageously. A parliament of men could not have made more noise. Pécopin was dazzled by this pack. All his hunting instincts revived, and yet there was something mysterious in the manner of its arrival on the scene, and it struck him as odd that until he actually saw the dogs he should not have heard them.

The whipper-in who led all this hunting train was a few feet from Pécopin, with his back towards him. Pécopin put his hand on the man's shoulder to ask him a question. He turned; the whipper-in was masked. Pécopin was struck dumb, and was beginning to ask himself very seriously whether he was wise to join such a hunt as this, when the old lord addressed him.

"Well, Sir Knight, what think you of our dogs?"

"I think that extraordinary horses will be required to follow such terrific dogs."

Without answering, the huntsman put a silver whistle to his lips. A trampling was immediately heard among the trees, the bystanders drew to one side, and four grooms in scarlet liveries appeared leading two magnificent horses.

One was a Spanish jennet of wonderful symmetry, with smooth, blackish, well-hollowed hoofs, the pasterns short, the forelegs muscular and nervous, the knees lean and firmly set in their sockets, the chest broad and well developed.

The other was a Tartar racer, very broad in the hind quarters, long in the body, and smooth in the flanks. His finely arched neck was clothed with a thick, crisp mane, his great tail swept the ground, the eyes were brilliant, mouth large, ears restless, nostrils wide; he was seven years old, and his mettle at its highest. The first had armour on the forehead and chest, and a war saddle; the second was less proudly but more magnificently caparisoned. He had a silver bit, a bridle worked in gold, a regal saddle, a brocaded saddle-cloth, and a waving plume.



The one stamped, foamed, snorted, champed the bit, and seemed to ask for war. The other glanced here and there as if demanding admiration, neighed lightheartedly, seemed scarcely to rest on the ground, and gave himself royal airs. Both were black as ebony. Pécopin, lost in admiration, feasted his eyes on these superb beasts.

"Well," said the old lord, limping and coughing, but smiling still. "Which do you choose?"

Pécopin's indecision vanished: he jumped upon the jennet.

"Are you ready?" asked the old hunter.

"Yes," answered Pécopin.

Then the old man burst into loud laughter, with one hand tore off the plume, the saddle, and the trappings of the Tartar horse, seized his mane with the other, and bounded with a tiger-like leap on to the bare back of the splendid animal, which was trembling in every limb. Then, seizing his horn, he blew such a formidable blast, that Pécopin, half deafened, thought this hunter must carry thunder in his bosom.

CHAPTER IX



THE sound of the horn the forest was illuminated to its innermost depths by a thousand strange and glimmering lights, shadows flitted to and fro, and distant voices cried, "En chasse." The pack bayed, the horses snorted, and the trees rustled as if swept by a high wind. At the same moment a cracked bell tolled midnight bleatingly from out of the darkness. As the twelfth stroke died away the old lord blew a second blast upon his ivory horn, and thereupon the huntsmen let loose the dogs, which flew like so many stones hurled from a catapult. The clamour broke forth louder than ever, and re-echoed through the forest, and the whole hunt, the old lord and Pécopin at its head, started off at full speed. It was indeed a fearful, unearthly gallop, headlong and violent beyond all words. Pécopin was carried out of himself, dazed as by lightning, intoxicated as by

the fumes of wine, maddened as by the strife of battle. The hoofs of his horse struck fire as they flashed through the forest, and seemed to ring in his brain as if his head were the road down which they tore. The forest was huge, the hunters countless, glade followed upon glade, the wind howled, the bushes shivered; the dogs bayed, the outline of a gigantic stag of sixteen antlers was now and again visible through the branches, and then was lost among the glimmering lights and shadows; the trees bowed themselves forward as if gazing fearfully upon the hunt, and drew back after it had passed them. Dominating all other sounds, the horn of the old hunter was heard in the distance.

Pécopin could not tell where he was. He passed a ruin, half hidden by fir trees, in the midst of which a waterfall leapt down a great rock of porphyry; he thought he recognised the Castle of Nideck. Then on his left hand flew past him what appeared to be the Lower Vosges; he noted in succession the outline of their four summits, the Bau-de-la-Roche, the Champ-du-Feu, the Climont, and the Ungersberg. A moment

later he was in the Upper Vosges. In less than a quarter of an hour his horse had traversed the Giromagny, the Rotabac, the Tultz, the Barenkopf, the Graisson, the Bressoir, the Haut-de-Houce, the Mont de Lure, the Tête-de-l'Ours, the great Donon, and the great Ventron. These huge peaks appeared to him confusedly amidst the darkness, without sequence or link ; it seemed as if a giant, in sport, had overthrown the vast mountain range of Alsace.

Now he fancied he saw beneath him the lakes which the Vosges carry on their summits, as if these mountains were flying beneath the belly of his horse. It was thus he caught sight of his shadow reflected in the Bains-des-Païens and in the Saut-des-Cuves, in the Lac Blanc and the Lac Noir. But he saw it as the swallows see theirs when they skim the mirrored surface of a pool—vanishing as soon as seen. Still, wild and desperate as the ride was, he took courage from touching his talisman, and reflecting that after all he was not leaving the Rhine.

All at once he was plunged in a thick mist, through which at first the trees loomed faintly,

and then were blotted out altogether. The noise of the hunt was redoubled in this gloom, and the Spanish jennet galloped with renewed fury. The fog was so thick that Pécopin could scarcely see his horse's ears.

In such terrible straits it must be a great effort, and assuredly is a great merit, to rest your soul on God, and your heart upon your mistress, as did the brave knight. He was thinking of God and of Bauldour—perhaps even more of Bauldour than of God—when the sighing of the wind seemed to him to become a voice, and uttered distinctly the word *Heimbürg*.

Just then, by the light of a great torch carried by one of the huntsmen, Pécopin saw overhead a kite, transfixed by an arrow, but still flying. He strained his eyes to see the bird more clearly, but his horse gave a bound, the kite flapped its wings, the torch disappeared into the wood, and again he was in darkness. A few moments later the voice spoke again, and said *Vaughtsburg*.

Again a light shone through the mist, and Pécopin saw in the shadow a vulture, its wing

pierced by a javelin, but still flying. He opened his eyes to see and his mouth to cry out, but before he could utter a sound, the light, the vulture, and the javelin had vanished. The horse had not slackened its pace, but plunged full tilt among these phantoms as if it had been the blind horse of the demon Paphos, or the blind horse of King Sisymordachus. A third time the wind spoke, and Pécopin heard the mournful aerial voice say *Rheinstein*.

A third flash illuminated the trees through the fog, and a third bird flew by. It was an eagle pierced by a dart. Then Pécopin recalled the hunting party of the Pfalzgraf, in which he had been tempted to join, and he shuddered. Still, the jennet galloped so desperately, the trees and vague outlines of the nocturnal landscape flew by so rapidly, the pace was so prodigious, that even in his own mind there could be no repose. Apparitions and visions followed hard one upon another, so confusedly that he could not fix his thoughts even upon his own melancholy memories. Ideas coursed through his brain like the wind. In the distance the noise of the hunt

was still heard, and the monstrous stag belled in the thicket.

Little by little the mist dispersed, the air grew suddenly milder, and the character of the vegetation changed. Cork and pistachio trees were seen among the rocks; a great white moon, ringed with a huge halo, shed a weird light over the landscape, and yet, by the almanac, there should have been no moon that night.

Galloping down a deep lane, Pécopin stooped and pulled a handful of weeds from the bank. By the light of the moon he examined them, and recognised with dismay the woundwort of the Cevennes, the filiform veronica, and the giant fennel. Half-an-hour later the wind was still hotter; glimpses of the sea were ever and anon visible through the gaps of the forest. Again he stooped and plucked a handful of plants at random. This time it was the bean trefoil of Cette, the star-anemone of Nice, the crimson geranium of the Basses-Pyrenees.

It was evident that Pécopin was leaving the Rhine behind him with frightful rapidity. Between the two handfuls of leaves he had travelled



It was an eagle pierced by a dart



more than a hundred leagues. He had crossed the Vosges, he had crossed the Cevennes, he was at this moment crossing the Pyrenees. "Sooner death," thought he, and tried to throw himself from his horse; but at the movement he made to dismount, he felt his feet gripped as if by hands of steel; he looked—his stirrups were holding him fast. They were living stirrups. Distant shouts, neighing of horses, and barking of dogs mingled together in wild confusion. Strangely far away, preceding the hunt, was heard the sinister sound of the old hunter's horn, and between the livid, wind-shaken branches Pécopin saw the hounds swimming across pools full of magical reflections. The luckless knight resigned himself to his fate, let himself go, and closed his eyes.

Once he opened them. The furnace heat of a tropical night smote upon his cheek, vague sounds of roaring of tigers and cries of jackals reached his ears; he caught glimpses of ruined temples on the pinnacles of which were gravely poised rows of vultures and cranes. The valley was filled with fantastically grouped trees of a form strange to him. He thought he recognised the banyan and



the baobab. Pécopin was in an Indian forest. Again he closed his eyes.

Soon he re-opened them. In a quarter of an hour an icy blast had succeeded the fiery breath of the equator. The cold was intense, and the horse's hoofs rang sharply on the frozen ground. The mountains and woods were terribly rugged. Two or three rocks of immense height were all that could be seen on the horizon, a few gulls circling round them, and beyond, glimpses of long white waves, dashing flakes of foam towards the sky, while in return the sky showered back flakes of snow. A moment after the night grew more densely black. Pécopin could now see nothing, but he heard a frightful noise, and realised he was passing the Maelstrom, the Tartarus of the ancients and the navel of the sea.

What was this fearful forest which encircled the whole earth? The monstrous stag reappeared at intervals, always fleeing and always pursued. The spectral sounds and shadows followed helter-skelter on his track; dominating all else, even the noise of the Maelstrom, was heard the horn of the aged huntsman. All at once the jennet stopped

short, the baying of the hounds ceased, everything fell silent.

The poor knight, who for an hour past had closed his eyes, now opened them. He saw before him a gloomy and gigantic building, the brilliantly lit windows of which seemed to glare like as many fiery eyes. This façade was sombre as a mask and living as a human countenance.

CHAPTER X



WHAT was this building? It would be difficult to say. It was a house as strong as a fortress, a fortress magnificent as a palace, a palace as threatening as a dungeon, a dungeon as silent as a grave. No voice was heard within, no shadow was seen. Around this stupendous castle the forest stretched as far as the eye could reach. There was no longer any moonlight, only a few stars on the horizon showed red as blood.

The horse had stopped at a flight of steps leading up to a great closed door. Pécopin looked right and left; he seemed dimly to distinguish along the whole length of the façade other flights of steps, before which stood immovable other knights, halting as he halted and waiting in silence as he waited. Pécopin drew his sword and was about to knock with the hilt on the marble balustrade, when the horn sounded suddenly close by the

castle, powerful, sonorous, deafening, as the storm-laden clarion of the fallen angels. The horn ceased. The echo had scarcely died away when the doors of the castle opened violently outwards, as if propelled by a wind from within. A flood of light streamed out.

The jennet mounted the steps, and Pécopin entered a vast and brilliantly lit hall. The walls of this hall were hung with tapestry, representing scenes from Roman history. The space between the panels was inlaid in ivory and cypress wood. A gallery running round the hall was filled with flowers and plants. The pavement was a mosaic setting forth the story of the Trojan war. The horse, whose hoofs rang sonorously upon the marble floor, crossed this first hall deliberately, without any guidance, and entered the second chamber, equally vast, deserted, and brilliantly illuminated. Large panels of carved cedar wood adorned this room, and within these panels some mysterious artist had inserted marvellous pictures, inlaid with gold and mother-of-pearl. There were battles, hunting scenes, festivals, jousts, naval engagements, with every sort of vessel sailing upon a sea of turquoises,

emeralds, and sapphires, imitating astonishingly well the billowing of the ocean.

Beneath these pictures ran a frieze, sculptured by a master-hand, and representing in their multifarious relations to one another the three races of earth who possess intellect—giants, men, and dwarfs. Everywhere in this work the giants and dwarfs humiliated man—smaller than the giants and stupider than the dwarfs. Notwithstanding this, the ceiling seemed to offer a certain malicious homage to human intelligence. It was entirely covered with medallions, on which shone, illuminated by a dull glow, and crowned with the crown of Pluto, portraits of all the men to whom the world owes discoveries, reputed useful, and who on this account are called *Benefactors of Humanity*. Each was there in virtue of the invention he had made; Arabus for medicine, Dædalus for mazes, Pisistratus for books, Aristotle for libraries, Tubalcain for anvils, Architas for artillery, Noah for navigation, Abraham for geometry, Moses for the trumpet, Amphictyon for the interpretation of dreams, Frederick Barbarossa for falconry, and Sieur Bachon of Lyons for squaring

the circle. In the angles of the arched roof were grouped, as the chief stars in this sky of human constellations, many illustrious countenances : Flavius who invented the compass, Christopher Columbus who discovered America, Botargus who concocted the most famous sauces, Mars who invented war, Faustus who discovered printing, the Monk Schwartz who invented gunpowder, and the Pope Pontian who invented cardinals. Several of those personages were unknown to Pécopin for the reason that they were not yet born at the date of this story.

The knight, borne along by the sole will of his horse, made his way through a long series of magnificent halls.

In one of them he noticed on the eastern wall the following inscription in letters of gold : "The Caoué, or Cave of the Arabs, is a herb which grows abundantly in the Turkish Empire, and is called in India the miraculous herb, being prepared as follows : 'Take half an ounce of this herb, reduce it to powder, and infuse in a pint of plain water for three or four hours ; then boil till a third of the liquid is consumed.

Drink it very gradually, almost as if inhaling it. Well-to-do persons flavour it with sugar or ambergris.' ”

Opposite, on the western wall, shone this other legend: “Greek fire is made with ashes of willow wood, salt, brandy, sulphur, pitch, incense, and camphor. It burns under water without other ingredient, and consumes all matter.”

In another hall the sole decoration was a life-like portrait of that lackey who at Trimalchio's feast perambulated the table, singing in a delicate voice the praises of such sauces as are principally composed of benzoin.

Everywhere torches, lustrous candles, chandeliers reflected in enormous mirrors of burnished steel or copper, illuminated these huge and gorgeous apartments wherein Pécopin did not meet one living soul, and through which he advanced with a haggard eye and troubled in spirit, alone, uneasy, scared, full of such unutterable and confused thoughts as come to those who dream in the gloomy depths of a forest.

At last he reached a door of reddish metal,

over which was seen a big golden apple, with foliage of precious stones; and on this apple were engraved these two lines—

“Adam invented dinner,
Eve invented dessert.”

CHAPTER XI



AS he was trying to fathom the ironical humour of this inscription, the door slowly opened and the horse entered. Pécopin was as a man who passes in a moment from the most brilliant sunshine of mid-day to the gloomiest recesses of a cavern. The door closed behind him, and the place he had entered was so dark that at first he thought himself blinded: he could only discern at some distance a wan and diffused glimmer. Little by little his eyes, dazzled by the preternatural brilliancy of the apartments he had passed through, became accustomed to the darkness, and he began to distinguish, as through a veil, the thousand monstrous pillars of a prodigious Babylonian hall. The faint light in the centre of this hall took outline, shadowy forms became visible, and in a few moments the knight began to recognise, in the midst of a forest of twisted columns, a huge table, luridly lit up by seven

blue flickering flames issuing from a seven-branched candlestick. At the head of the table, on a throne of green gold, sat a giant of living brass. This giant was Nimrod. Right and left of him, on chairs of iron, sat a crowd of pale and silent guests, some with Moorish head-dresses, others more richly decked with pearls than the Rajah of Bisnagar. Pécopin recognised all the famous hunters whose names live in history. The King Mithrobuzane; the tyrant Machanidas; the Roman Consul Æmilius; Barbula II.; Rollo, King of the Sea; Zuentibold, the unworthy son of Arnolphus the Great, King of Lorraine; Haganon, favourite of Charles of France; Herbert, Count of Vermandois; Guillaume Tête-d'Étoupe, Count of Poitiers, founder of the illustrious house of Réchignevoisin; the Pope Vitalianus; Fardulphus, Abbot of St. Denis; Athelstane, King of England; and Aïgrolf, King of Denmark. Beside Nimrod, resting on his elbow, was Cyrus, who founded the Persian Empire 2000 years before Christ, and who had his armorial bearings emblazoned on his breast.

This table was served with imperial state. At the four corners were celebrated huntresses—Queen Emma; Queen Ogive, mother of Louis d'Outremer; Queen Gerberge; and Diana, who, in her quality of goddess, had a canopy and a diadem like the three queens. None of the guests were speaking or eating. A large empty space in the midst of the table seemed to wait the repast, and upon it there was nothing but flasks, wherein sparkled a thousand beverages from all the countries of the world. Palm-tree wine of India, rice-wine of Bengal, distilled water of Sumatra, arrack from Japan, the pampis of the Chinese, and the pechinez of the Turks. Here and there, in capacious earthenware pitchers, richly enamelled, foamed the drink called by the Norwegians *wel*, the Goths *buska*, the Corinthians *vo*, the Slavonians *oll*, the Poles *pwo*, and by us named *beer*. Negroes, who resembled demons, or demons who resembled negroes, stood round the table, upright, dumb, napkin under arm and ewer in hand. Each guest had, as was meet, his dwarf beside him. Madam Diana had her greyhound.

Gazing fixedly into the misty depths of this extraordinary place, Pécopin saw that in the immensity, perhaps limitless immensity, of the hall beneath the forest of pillars was a multitude of spectators, all on horseback like himself, all in hunting garb, shadows in their obscurity, spectres in their silence, statues in their immobility. Amongst the nearest of them he thought he recognised the knights who followed the old huntsman in the forest of Lost Steps. As I have said, guests, attendants, and spectators preserved a terrifying silence, and had a sound proceeded from them it would have been as startling as if the stones of a sepulchre were to speak. It was piercingly cold in this murky gloom, and Pécopin was chilled to the marrow, yet he felt the sweat pour from every limb.

All at once the baying of hounds was heard, distant at first, soon violent, joyous and savage, then the sound of the old huntsman's horn mingled with the noise of the dogs, and he began to execute, with triumphant splendour, an admirable hallali, perfectly new and strange, which, recovered centuries later by Roland de

Lattré in a midnight inspiration, procured for this great musician on April 6, 1574, the honour of being created by Pope Gregory XIII. Knight of St. Peter of the Golden Spur, *de numero participantium*. At these sounds Nimrod raised his head, the Abbot Fardulphus turned half round, and Cyrus, who was leaning on his right elbow, now leaned upon his left.

CHAPTER XII



HE baying of the dogs and the sound of the horn grew nearer, a large double door, opposite to that by which Pécopin had entered, opened wide, and the knight saw advancing through a long dim gallery the two hundred torch-bearers, carrying on their shoulders a gigantic dish of greenish gold, on which lay, roasted and smoking and surrounded with an ocean of gravy, the sixteen-antlered stag. Preceding the linkmen, whose torches glowed like live coals, came the old hunter mounted on his foam-flecked Arab courser, and horn in hand. He no longer winded it, but smiled courteously, undisturbed by the persistent clamour of the pack which, still led by the masked huntsman, followed the stag. When the procession turned from the gallery into the hall, the torches burned blue and the dogs suddenly became silent.

These ferocious animals followed their master

at a slow pace, with imploring eyes, drooping heads, their tails between their legs, their bodies quivering in abject terror, towards the table where the mysterious guests still sat, as pallid, unmoved, and gloomy as marble figures. The old man when he reached the table looked the lugubrious revellers full in the face and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Hombres et mugeres or ca vosostros belle signore, domini et dominae, amigos mios. How goes it?"

"You are very late," said the man of brass.

"That is because I wanted a friend to see the hunt," answered the old man.

"Yes," said Nimrod, "but look yonder," and he pointed his thumb over his brazen shoulder towards the extreme end of the hall.

Pécopin's eyes mechanically took the same direction, and discerned on the black walls some faint, arched outlines, as if of windows, vaguely defined by the earliest glimmer of dawn.

"It is well," said the hunter, "we must make haste."

And at a sign from him the two hundred torch-

bearers made ready to lay the roasted stag upon the table at the foot of the seven-branched candlestick.

Then Pécopin dug his spurs into the flanks of his jennet, which, strange to say, obeyed him, perhaps because the power of witchcraft was lessened by the approach of day. He forced his way between the table and the torch-bearers, raised himself in his stirrups, drew his sword, gazed steadily in turn upon the sinister countenances round the great table, and upon the old hunter, and cried in a voice of thunder—

“*Pardieu*, spectres, ghosts, apparitions or visions, emperors or fiends, whosoever ye may be, I forbid you to make one step, or by the grace of God, I will show you all, even you, Man of Brass, how heavily the iron boot of a living knight can weigh upon the head of a phantom. I am in the abode of shadows, but for all that I will do real and terrible things. Stand aside, my masters! And you, miserable old man, who lied to me, you can fight as well as any youth, since you blow your horn with the strength and fury of a bull. Draw and

defend yourself, or, by the Mass, I will run you through, though you were Pluto himself!"

"Ah! there you are, my dear fellow," said the old man. "Good; you shall sup with us."

The smile which accompanied this gracious invitation goaded Pécopin to fury.

"Defend yourself, old scoundrel; you made me a promise and deceived me."

"Hijo! wait for the end; what do you know about it?"

"Draw, I say."

"Heydey, my worthy friend, you take things amiss."

"Give me back Bauldour; you promised her to me."

"Who told you I was not going to give her back to you? But what will you do with her when you see her again?"

"She is my betrothed, as you very well know, miserable wretch, and I shall marry her," said Pécopin.

"And so in a very short time there will be one melancholy and unhappy couple the more," said the old hunter, nodding his head. "Bah!



"Draw, I say!"

what does it matter to me after all. It is the natural course of events; male and female here below have an evil example set them by the male and female up above, the sun and moon, a most ill-assorted pair, never seen together."

"Cease your jesting," cried the knight, "or I will make an end of you and of all these demons and their goddesses, and purge this cavern from end to end."

"Purge away, my friend," said the old man, with the laugh of a buffoon; "here is the prescription: rhubarb, senna, and Epsom salts."

Pécopin threw himself furiously upon him, sword in hand, but his horse had scarcely gone a step when he felt him tremble and sink down. A cold, pale streak of dawn had crept into the cavern and was gliding along the livid pavement. The old hunter still stood motionless and smiling, but all the bystanders began to fade away; the lights and torches burned low, the pale gaze of the spectres, a moment animated by Pécopin's outburst, was now completely extinguished, and through the huge brazen torso of the giant Nimrod, as through a glass vessel, the knight

distinctly saw the pillars at the far end of the hall. His horse became gradually impalpable, and was melting away under him; his feet almost touched the ground.

Suddenly a cock crew. There was something indescribably weird in this clear, metallic, vibrating sound, which seemed to pierce Pécopin's ear like a steel blade. A light breeze sprang up, his horse vanished completely, he staggered and almost fell. When he recovered himself, all had disappeared. He was alone, standing, sword in hand, in a ravine overgrown with heather — a few paces from a waterfall which foamed among the rocks, and at the gates of an ancient castle. It was daybreak. He lifted his eyes and uttered a cry of joy. It was the castle of Falkenburg.

CHAPTER XIII



HE cock crew a second time. The sound came from the inner courtyard of the castle. This cock, at whose shrill clarion the nightmare palace of the huntsmen of the night had crumbled into nothingness, had perhaps, a few hours earlier, fed from the blessed hands of Bauldour. O power of love, generous strength of the heart, fervid radiance of youth and passion ! Scarcely had Pécopin seen again these well-loved towers than the fresh and dazzling image of his betrothed rose before him and filled him with light, dispersing like a fleeting vapour all the miseries of the past, the embassies of kings, the weary travel, the spectres, the frightful whirlpool of visions from which he had just escaped.

Pécopin sheathed his sword and strode towards the castle. Its windows, lit up by the earliest

sunbeams, seemed to smile back at the smiling dawn. As he drew near the bridge, of which at the present day only one arch remains, a voice behind him said, "Well, Knight of Sonneck, have I kept my promise?"

CHAPTER XIV



E turned. Two men stood among the heather. One was the masked huntsman, and Pécopin shuddered at the sight of him. He carried a red portfolio under his arm. The other was a little old humpbacked man, lame and hideously ugly. It was he that spoke to Pécopin, and Pécopin tried to recall where he had seen that face before.

"So, my good sir," continued the humpback, "you do not recognise me?"

"Yes, indeed I do," said Pécopin.

"That's right!"

"You are the slave from the shores of the Red Sea."

"I am the hunter of the forest of Lost Steps," answered the little man.

It was the foul fiend.

"By my faith," rejoined Pécopin, "be whom-

soever you like, but, in short, since you have proved a man of your word, since here I am at Falkenburg, since I shall see Bauldour again, consider me your servant, sir, and I thank you heartily."

"Last night you upbraided me : what did I say to you ?"

"You said, 'Wait for the end.'"

"And now you thank me, I say again, 'Wait for the end.' You were perhaps too hasty in your accusations ; you are perhaps premature in your thanks."

As he spoke the little hunchback's face wore an expression quite indescribable : irony is the very countenance of the devil. Pécopin started.

"What do you mean ?"

The devil pointed to the masked huntsman.

"Do you remember that man ?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him ?"

"No."

The huntsman unmasked. It was Erlangus. Pécopin felt himself tremble. The devil continued—

"Pécopin, you were my creditor. I owed you two things: this hump and this club foot. Now, I am an honest debtor. I went to look for your old servant Erlangus to find out your tastes. He told me you were fond of hunting. Then I said to myself it would be a thousand pities for so fine a hunter not to take part in the Black Hunt. As the sun set I met you in a woodland glade. You were in the forest of Lost Steps. I was just in time; the dwarf Roulon was going to take you. I took you myself."

Pécopin shuddered involuntarily. The devil went on.

"Had you not worn your talisman I would have kept you, but I had as lief things should be as they are. Revenge is sweet, with whatever sauce it may be served."

"What do you mean, fiend?" Pécopin stammered.

The devil continued—

"To reward Erlangus for his information, I have made him my secretary; he has a good salary."

"Will you explain your meaning, you sorry blackguard?" repeated Pécopin.



"What was my promise?"

"That after this night spent in hunting with you, at sunrise you would bring me back to Falkenburg."

"You are there."

"Tell me, demon, is Bauldour dead?"

"No."

"Has she taken the veil?"

"No."

"Does she no longer love me?"

"She loves you still."

"Then, if you speak truth," cried Pécopin, drawing a long breath, as if relieved of a mountain weight, "whatever happens, and whosoever you may be, I thank you."

"Go, then," said the devil; "you are content, and so am I."

So saying, he seized Erlangus in his arms, though he was small and Erlangus was big, then twisting his lame leg round the other, and raising himself on tiptoe, he executed a pirouette, and Pécopin saw him plunge into the earth like a gimlet. A second afterwards he had disappeared.

In closing over the fiend the earth emitted a

pretty little violet light, glowing with green sparks. It flickered gaily, with sundry fantastic leaps and twirls, as far as the forest, where it lingered for some time as if suspended from the branches, illuminating them with a thousand brilliant tints like a rainbow caught among the foliage.

CHAPTER XV



ÉCOPIN shrugged his shoulders.

“Baldour lives, Baldour is free, Baldour loves me,” he thought; “what have I to fear? It was precisely five years yesterday evening, just before I met the fiend, since I left her; well, it is now five years and a day! I shall find her lovelier than ever. Woman is the fair sex, and twenty is the fairest age.”

In those days of robust fidelity five years were a trifle.

Soliloquising thus, Pécopin drew near the castle, recognising with delight each embossment of the gateway, each indentation of the portcullis, each nail of the drawbridge. He felt himself happy and welcome. The threshold of the house which knew us as children, on seeing us grown-up men, seems to smile the happy smile of a mother.

As he crossed the bridge he noticed, near the third arch, a magnificent oak, the top of which towered above the parapet. "That is odd," he said to himself; "there used not to be any tree there." Then he remembered that, two or three weeks before the day when he fell in with the Palatine's hunting party, he had played knuckle-bones with Bauldour, using acorns for the purpose, and leaning the while on the parapet, and that at this very spot he had dropped an acorn in the moat.

"The deuce!" thought he; "in five years the acorn has become an oak. This is something like a soil!"

Four birds, perched on this oak tree, were trying which could chatter the loudest. They were a jackdaw, a blackbird, a magpie, and a raven. Pécopin scarcely noticed them, any more than he did a pigeon which was cooing in the dovecot, or a hen which clucked in the courtyard. He was thinking only of Bauldour, and hurried on. The sun was now showing above the horizon; the porters had just lowered the drawbridge. As Pécopin passed through the gateway he heard

behind him a peal of laughter, which, though very distinct and very prolonged, yet sounded a great way off. It was the devil laughing in his den.

Under the archway there was a deep, still pool of water. The knight stooped over it and gazed at his reflection. After the fatigues of his long journey, which had left him with scarcely more than a few rags to cover him, and more especially after the fearful strain of the night before, he thought he should be frightened by his own image. Not at all. Whether by virtue of the talisman given him by the Sultana, or from the effect of the elixir the demon had made him drink, he was more charming, fresher, younger than ever. What chiefly surprised him was to see himself magnificently appavelled from head to foot. His ideas were so completely confused that he could not recall at what time during the night he had been thus arrayed. His fine clothes became him mightily. He was dressed like a prince, and had the air of a paladin.

While gazing at his own image, somewhat astonished but well pleased, he heard a second

peal of laughter, even more full of terrible mirth than the first. He looked round, but saw nothing. It was the devil laughing in his cavern.

As he crossed the principal courtyard the men-at-arms looked out from the battlements, but none recognised him and he recognised no one. The short-kilted maid-servants washing the linen by the stream turned to look at him, but none knew him and he knew no one. Still, he had so noble an air that he was suffered to pass unchallenged. A grand air presupposes a great name. Pécopin knew his way, and made straight for the little winding stair that led to Bauldour's chamber. It struck him as he crossed the yard that the façade of the castle was not a little rugged and weather-beaten, and that the ivy which clothed the north front had grown immoderately thick, while the vine which clambered over the southern wall had strangely increased in girth. But a few blackened stones and a few leaves more or less are not enough to disconcert a lover.

When he reached the turret he had some difficulty in finding the door. At the time when

Pécopin left the country Bauldour's father had just caused the entrance to be rebuilt with the beautiful white Heidelberg stone. This entrance, which Pécopin calculated had been built just five years, was now much discoloured and cracked, and weeds had forced their way through here and there. Beneath the doorway several swallows had built their nests. But a lover's heart thinks but little of a few swallows' nests. If flashes of lightning were in the habit of mounting stair-cases, I should compare Pécopin to them. In the twinkling of an eye he had reached the fifth storey and stood before the door of Bauldour's retreat. This door, at least, was neither blackened nor in any way altered. It was still bright and spotless, the iron-work gleaming like silver and the wood-work as shining as the tresses of a lovely maiden.

It was easy to see that this was the same virginal door which Bauldour's women washed each day by order of their young mistress. The key was in the lock, as if Bauldour expected Pécopin. He had but to turn this key and enter. He paused, breathless with joy and tenderness—perhaps also from having flown up five flights of

stair. Flames danced before his eyes, a buzzing was in his ears, his temples throbbed. When this first moment of excitement had passed, when silence succeeded to the inward tumult, he listened. Who could describe the emotions of this poor heart intoxicated with love? He heard through the door the sound of a spinning-wheel.

CHAPTER XVI



F course it might easily be that this spinning-wheel was not Bauldour's, and perhaps it was only one of her women spinning, for Bauldour's oratory was near by her room and she often spent her days there. If she spun much, she prayed still more. Pécopin told himself all this, but none the less he listened with ecstasy to the sound of the wheel. Such are the follies of a lover, especially when the lover has a high spirit and a great heart. Moments such as Pécopin was now living through are compounded of ecstasy which wants to linger and impatience which desires to advance. For a little while both tremble in the balance, then impatience carries the day. At last he tremblingly touched the key, it turned in the lock, the door opened and he entered.

"Ah," thought he, "I was mistaken; it was not Bauldour's spinning-wheel."

There was indeed some one spinning, but it was an old woman. Old woman is too mild a term: it was an old witch, for witches alone attain to such fabulous age and decrepitude.

Now, this crone seemed more than a hundred years old. Imagine, if you can, a poor little human or superhuman being, bowed and bent, tanned, bleared, shrunk, and crabbed; hair and eyebrows white, teeth and lips discoloured, emaciated, yellow, bald, cadaverous, palsied, and hideous. This venerable and terrible apparition was sitting, or rather cowering, near the window, her eyes fixed on her wheel, her distaff in her hand, like a Fate.

The good dame was probably very deaf, for the noise Pécopin made in opening the door and entering did not cause her to look up. Nevertheless the knight uncovered and saluted with all the observance due to such venerable age, and making a step forward, said—

“Madam duenna, where is Bauldour?”

The centenarian raised her eyes, let fall her thread, half raised herself from her seat, stretched forth towards Pécopin her long skeleton hands, fixed upon him a spectral gaze, and said in a

voice so feeble and hollow that it seemed to come from the tomb—

“O Heaven, Sir Pécopin, what is it you need? Do you desire masses said for your soul? Great God, are you dead, Sir Pécopin, that your spirit revisits us?”

“Upon my word, worthy dame,” said Pécopin, breaking into laughter, and raising his voice so that Bauldour should hear him if she was in her oratory, a little surprised nevertheless that the aged duenna knew his name, “I am not dead—it is not my spirit which revisits you, but *I* who have returned, I, Pécopin, so please you, a jolly flesh-and-blood ghost. And I want no masses, but a kiss from my betrothed, from Bauldour, whom I love more than ever.”

As he uttered these words, the old crone threw herself upon his neck.

It was Bauldour.

Alas! the night of the Devil's Hunt had lasted a hundred years. Bauldour was not dead, thanks to God, or to the foul fiend, but at the moment when Pécopin, himself as young, perhaps even handsomer than ever, found her again, the poor soul was one hundred and twenty years old.

CHAPTER XVII



ÉCOPIN fled in horror. He dashed down the stairs, rushed through the gateway, over the bridge, climbed the escarpment, crossed the ravine, leapt the torrent, forced his way through the undergrowth, scaled the mountain and took refuge in the Castle of Sonneck. He ran all day, terrified, desperate, beside himself. He still loved Bauldour, but the recollection of that ghastly figure filled him with terrified loathing. He could not tell what to make of his intellect, his memory or his heart. When night came, seeing that he had wandered close to the towers of the castle where he was born, he rent the magnificent garments of mockery in which the devil had clothed him, and flung them into the profoundest depths of the torrent of Sonneck. Then, tearing his hair, he all at once perceived that he held a handful of white hairs. Suddenly his knees shook, his back became

bowed, he was forced to lean against a tree, his hands were deeply wrinkled. In the wildness of his grief, having lost all consciousness of what he did, he had seized the talisman, wrenched it from his neck, and hurled it with his raiment into the torrent. And the words of the Sultana's slave were accomplished on the instant. He had aged a hundred years. In the morning he had lost his love, in the evening he lost his youth. At that moment, for the third time on this fatal day, some one laughed behind him. He turned, but saw nobody. It was the devil laughing in his cavern.

What could he do after this final blow? He picked up a stick, dropped by some wood-cutter, and leaning on it walked painfully to his castle, which was fortunately very near. As he approached it he saw, in the twilight, a jay, a magpie, a black-bird, and a raven perched over the entrance, who seemed to await him. He heard a hen, which he could not see, say "Pécopin, Pécopin," and he heard a pigeon, which he could not see, say "Bauldour, Bauldour." Then he remembered his dream at Bacharach, the words spoken, alas! a



In one moment he had aged a hundred years

hundred and five years ago by the old man who was piling logs against a wall.

"Sir, to the ear of the young man the jay chatters, the magpie screeches, the blackbird whistles, the raven croaks, the pigeon coos, and the hen clucks; for the old man, the birds talk."

He listened, therefore, and this is the dialogue he heard—

THE BLACKBIRD.

At last, my bold hunter, you come to your home.

THE JAY.

He who starts for a day, for a year he may roam.

THE RAVEN.

Kite, vulture, and eagle you hunted, I ween,

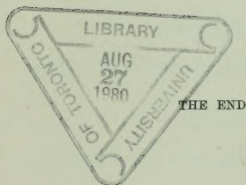
THE MAGPIE.

*But the soft bird of love should your quarry have
been.*

THE HEN.

Pécopin! Pécopin!

THE PIGEON.

Bauldour! Bauldour! Bauldour!

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